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Lamar University

Tracks to the Future, Ties to the Past

Toy trains. Real trains. Trains have always connected me to my family and shaped my life.

For reasons I will never know, trains have been a constant throughout my life. I never had a relative who worked for the railroad, never lived next to a busy rail line. And yet, from my earliest memories, I loved trains big and small. Through good times and bad, trains kept me on track to my future, their rails like silver threads running through the fabric of my life.

Before I was two years old, I played incessantly with the pull-train Mother bought for me at the 5 & 10. When Grannie read to me, she knew that “*The Little Engine that Could*” and “*The Little Red Caboose*” were sure to please. As I grew, Dad was always ready for a trip to the Albuquerque Depot, sacrificing his day off so that I could watch the trains. Bells clanging, whistles blaring, the ground trembling as those powerful trains rumbled by, their pungent smoke filling my nostrils; it was pure bliss, almost more than a four-year-old could bear! By the time I started school, even my favorite aunt and uncle joined in, giving me a Marx electric train that I still proudly run today.

The funny thing is, although the trains were always my focus, those trains tied me to my family, connected me to their love as surely as those big iron couplers held that train together. Whether parked trackside with Mother at railroad yards while I watched trains switch cars, or listening as Dad showed me how to set up my latest toy train, train time was always family time; train time was *love*. When times were bad, when my parents argued or when I was sick, the trains were there to remind me of better times, and reassure me that I was loved. As the years rolled on, trains and love and family remained, but now I was the one driving when Grannie and I went to see the trains.

Today I am sad to say that all my family has passed; but my love for trains lives on. When I see trains at railroad crossings, or run the toy trains of my youth on my layout, they still tie me to the past, connecting me to the love that lives on in my heart.